

The Stamps Surcharged "O.U.S."

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THE Oxford Union Society is probably familiar to most Collectors as a Club established by Members of the University to provide themselves with a Debating Hall, a Library, Reading and Smoking Rooms, and lastly a Writing Room. It is due to this last institution that the Society has become known to Philately.

The Union had in my time (it may have still) the very convenient custom of stamping all inland letters written and posted by members in the writing-room, the stamps used for this purpose being overprinted to prevent any possibility of their illicit sale.

I was a member of the Union from November 1877 until the end of 1882, and it happens that a series of about forty letters written by myself during term time to a friend, has been preserved in the original covers. I am therefore able to throw some new light upon the changes which occurred during the latest stages of the overprint.

The surcharge may be divided into four stages:—

- (a) O.U.S. reading upwards, in red, on the face of the stamp, between wavy red lines, 0.11in. apart.
- (b) O.U.S. reading upwards, in red, on the back of the stamp, before gum, between wavy lines, 0.14in. apart.
- (c) O.U.S. reading downwards, in red, on the back of the stamp, after gum, between wavy red lines, 0.11in. apart.
- (d) O.U.S. reading upwards, in red, on the back of the stamp, before gum, between wavy red lines, 0.11in. apart.

A. (1857-1870?).

I have three specimens of the 1d. lake of 1857; one of these is on the original cover, dated 15/10/59, the earliest I have at present seen.

Seven specimens of the 1d. lake, 1864, from plates 71, 72, 93, 96, 97, the last named on original cover, being dated 4/5/65.

Mr. Walter Morley has shewn me a specimen of this type with surcharge reading downwards. I possess no information for the years 1865-77, but the date of change to the next type is given in the Standard Catalogue as 1870.

B. (1870-80).

This surcharge is printed on the back of the stamp, before gum, and has its wavy lines wider apart, the letters being slightly closer together. I have the following plate numbers: 146, 162, 107, 204, 205, 212; the earliest dated specimen in my possession is plate 205, dated 4/11/77, and the latest plate 212, 18/6/79.

I was not in Oxford during the following six months, so that I cannot state accurately when the change took place.

C. (January to April, 1880).

In January, 1880, or possibly a little earlier, the narrow-lined type came into use again, on the back of the stamps, reading both downwards and upwards, but after gum in the specimens I possess; these are:—

Plate 174, dated 23/1/80, downwards.

„ 199, off the cover, upwards.

„ 223, dated 11/3/80, „

D. (May, 1880, to October, 1882).

The final change appears to be coincident with the change of the old red engraved stamp to the surface-printed Venetian-red stamp of 1880.

It is identical with type C, except that it was printed before gum, and all my specimens read downwards. I have 16 copies of the 1d. Venetian red, on original covers, dated from 2/5/80—12/6/81. Two of these covers, although posted at the Union, bearing the embossed seal, dated 5/10/80, and 3/4/81, respectively, bear unsurcharged stamps, due, I suppose, to a temporary deficiency in the supply.

Then follow seven specimens of 1d. pale mauve, 14 pearls, on originals, dated 16/10/81; these stamps must be scarce, for they came into use at the beginning of the Long Vacation, July 12th, and the writing room at the Union must have been little used until the following October; this gives the stamp a life of barely two months. Owing to the Christmas Vacation, I cannot give the exact date when the 16-pearl stamp appeared with the surcharge; my earliest copy is dated 23/1/82, and the dates of the next ten covers run on to 8/6/82. My first specimen after the long vacation is unsurcharged, 22/10/82, but the following week I have one surcharged as usual and dated 29/10/82; then follow others unsurcharged, 5/11/82, 12/11/84, 19/11/82 and 3/12/82, from which time I have never seen or heard of a stamp surcharged for the Union Society.

SYNOPSIS.

- A. 1857-70. Narrow surcharge on face.
id. lake, 1857.
id. lake, 1864, plates 71, 72, 93, 96, 97.
- B. 1870-80. Broad surcharge on back.
id. lake, plates 146, 162, 197, 204, 205, 212.
- C. 1880. January—April.
Narrow surcharge on back, after gum.
id. lake, plates 174, 199, 223.
- D. May, 1880—October, 1882.
Narrow surcharge on back, before gum.
id. Venetian-red.
id. pale mauve, 14 pearls, Oct-Dec., 1881.
id. „ „ 16 „ Jan.-Oct., 1882.

[This latter surcharge is in carmine-red, the former in vermilion red, Ed.]